

# A Book of Meditations



poems by John A. Blackard

Copyright 2015 by John A. Blackard

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Requests for permission to make copies of any part of the work should be submitted online at [www.johnablackard.com](http://www.johnablackard.com).

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.



## Storm Meditation

The empty page before me darkens  
when the birds stop singing--  
tree tops across a pasture to the south  
suddenly move as though a giant  
hand rakes across them--  
the deep voice of thunder calls  
from far far away and under my feet--  
the hemlocks, oaks, and maples  
around my house sway to the cooler  
air flooding the valley.

I follow thunder's song spreading  
across the sky as rain begins to fall--  
light enough to reveal the trees'  
drip lines on the ground,  
which quickly disappear once  
it is a living, visible presence  
surrounding my porch--  
the rainfall drowns out the wind,  
striking every earthbound thing with  
an animal ferocity, pelting  
the ground into submission.

Likewise, I feel myself yielding,

accepting, surrendering to  
the present moment--  
the storm has my undivided  
attention now-- unless you count  
my writing about it in media res  
to be a distraction-- the holy land  
gives off a sexual smell  
that warms and comforts--  
at last, lines of lightning illuminate  
the poem on the page before me.

## Beginner's Mind Meditation

What raucous talk from those crows,  
trading limbs in the pine behind the house.  
We've heard them there before,  
shooting the breeze while we breathe  
in, breathe out.

You got to give yourself a break  
when you're thinking again,  
got to use your pierced muscle  
of inspiration to breathe through all  
that suffering.

Like the orb-weaver waiting  
mindfully on the verge of his web.  
Like you've been flying into  
samsara for endless lifetimes.

Maybe only illusions of lifetimes  
created by an ignorant man.  
And now you find yourself, by some  
quirky leger de main, sitting  
at the lonely center of things.

Don't you feel like a cynosure

of the quotidian? There's another  
of the 50,000 thoughts you're likely  
to have today.

You've got that hooked look, beginner's  
mind, pondering the lotus of reality,  
constantly unfolding. You look like  
you're about to take a step forward

into the moment or a hundred  
down the road to nowhere.

## Ineffable Meditation

Some folks don't slow down enough  
to witness the present moment:

the potent color of the yogi's aura  
as he guides us in pranayama,

thousands of lightning bugs hiding  
at midnight in an oak tree,

the smell that rain evokes from dry earth,  
which some call *blood of the gods*,

find bluebird eggs dropped and  
broken by the neighborhood bear,

when we wander unaware off the path  
of freedom onto the road to servitude,

a Balinese woman's lovely feet move  
beneath a massage table's face-hole,

the whereabouts of our shoes the day  
after we permanently step into slippers,



the moment on the trip when we knew  
we'd never travel together again,

the great umami aftertaste of whatever  
we ate in a foreign street cafe,

our accent is obsolete and no longer  
places us on any current map,

where the narrow gap between  
reality and daydream is entered,

whatever made us scheme to hide  
between the covers of a book.

I've slowed down now to document  
such ineffable, ordinary moments.

## Scattering Monkeys Meditation

*When the tree falls, the monkeys scatter,*  
they said at Self-Preservation Business Park.  
They swing into their monkey cars for the commute

home, and it doesn't matter that the string of traffic  
is just the right length to spontaneously  
knot itself. They're unaware that so many things

in life plot to steal their time and identities. As the  
traffic creeps along, they notice but  
don't judge the grasshoppers in flight overhead,

making steady progress toward the exit ramp.  
While their cars cross the bridge  
at about one-knot, they sniff the river's fishiness

on the slight breeze and meditate on salmon  
and sturgeon swimming at about  
five-knots upstream of their consciousness,

for they grow dreamy-headed and content, sitting  
in the traffic-jam of the moment,  
watching the randomness of sunbreaks and the

hundreds of criss-crossing contrails. Meanwhile,  
the monkey dj on the car radio  
confesses the few minutes-- out of decades--

he was able to subdue his mind's earworms,  
and the young monkey in the back  
seat says to the elder monkey driving, "I'd bet

even Jesus and Mary get road rage sometimes."  
My monkey-mind's favorite time of  
day is when it's lost to itself on the way home.

## If You Love It Meditation

Nothing happens in  
    love so matter-of-factly  
as choice. So, If you  
    love it, do not ask the mountain  
whether it is wise to stare

    into its blue-ness,  
or ask the lake whether it  
    is joyful to swim in it,  
or ask the hummingbird whether  
    it is exhilarating

to be so quick, or  
    ask the cicada whether  
its brief life teaches it patience.  
Loving the moment illuminates  
    bodichitta.

## Patience Meditation

Lick by lick, the cow ate the grindstone,  
which she mistook for the moon,

Note by note, the mockingbird soon  
covered the classic songs of summer,

Bite by bite, the termite chewed through  
the emperor's throne,

Strand by strand, a lone spider caught  
the mighty human fly,

Inch by inch, the worm climbed the mountain,  
then the great bronze Buddha on top,

Drop by drop, the spring rain softened  
the inscrutable heart of his muse,

Wave by wave, the sea sent a  
continent on a cruise to the east,

Bud by bud, the dogwood crucified  
Christ, who then ceased to be a man,

Shovel by shovel, the old gardener turned  
his enemy's land into a paradise,

Minute by minute, nightfall hid the earth's  
beauty, but moonlight idolized it,

Kiss by kiss, lovers spontaneously  
lit up, phoenix-like, during tantra.

Cell by cell, cancer lovingly delivered  
karma to all who were strong enough,

One by one, his friends called his bluff  
and quietly died before him,

Dollar by dollar, on a whim he gambled  
away his life's savings but gained his life,

Syllable by syllable, the yogi's mantra  
revived the heart of the universe,

Thought by thought, the meditator observed  
his mind and little by little went blind.

## Emptiness Meditation

My body contains seven octillion individual atoms, an astounding number to me. Shouldn't I be bigger than 6'2" and 195 lbs.?

And since atoms are mostly empty space, my body could be stacked on the point of a pin if all that empty space were somehow extracted. This is

a very motivating fact for a meditator trying to fathom then empty his mind. Already my brain is mostly empty because its atoms are mostly

empty. Emptying my mind seems a lot more realizable just knowing this!

I visualize an atom of my brain, trusting a drawing from my seventh

grade physical science textbook, which is probably the first and last time I formally studied this building block of the physical universe. I contemplate

the negative space of it, which now  
seems easy to do. Then I mull over  
the negative space of enough atoms  
to fill up the inside of my skull,

which still seems like a piece of cake.  
From contemplating the emptiness  
of the atoms of my brain to meditating  
on the emptiness of my mind seems

like only a hop, skip, and a jump.  
This might be a break-through, bringing  
me closer in my hunt of a tabula rasa  
mind that is ready for anything.



## Dharma Proverbs Meditation

1-

*Don't chew cabbage twice*, they said  
of Attachment.

But, I knew I would-- the ulcerated,  
digestive tract of my attached life  
made me nibble rather than bite  
off more than I could chew,  
savoring it because I had developed  
a taste for bitterness.

I would find my hunger at times  
was so great I'd risk running through  
a thunderstorm to get to the cabbage  
buffet-- a rain so cold and saturating,  
it left me raw in minutes, gave me  
that road-kill look, progressing so  
quickly that turkey buzzards  
perched under the branches  
of my flailing arms, scorpions lurked  
under the ledges of my chin.

And I would learn that every  
ignorant man has his own favorite

way of being betrayed by it,  
even though some would argue  
that everything is a replacement,  
a copy of some lost or uber cabbage.

If I were you, I wouldn't become  
too attached to the taste,  
because the monoculture of your tongue  
will deplete your spiritual body.

2-

*Don't watch cooling wontons*, they said  
at Nourishing the Roots Sangha.

Their walking meditation mantra was  
"Cooling wontons will always burn  
your mouth, because reality is  
slower than you think."

Constantly watching wontons that  
I cannot have now isn't cool in  
anyone's practice: stand watch  
over what I love and I will be loveless.

Yes, meditators must understand  
the chemistry of love, be mindful now

of the boiling point, the scald of impatience.

Of course, consciousness will be cauled  
by suffering, yet mindfulness can  
loosen its long silk robe,  
revealing beauty draped over its  
own corpse.

Lovers of cooling wontons  
everywhere will come to know  
a thousand words for *love*.

Why not chant them all  
while they wait?

3-

*Dead songbirds make a sad meal,*  
they said at the roadside Buddhist altar.

While idling on the shoulder,  
I took a photo with my cell phone  
of oriental poppies looming  
like Bangkok hookers over  
a drainage ditch, waiting for some  
unsuspecting songbirds to choke  
on their auto-erotic perfumes.

I learned from a local that devotees  
    then bake them, an Asian delicacy--  
their songless heads made crispy  
    like croutons for a funereal salad.

The altar attendant was so thankful  
    for my offering of songbirds  
she probably wouldn't bat  
    an eyelash if she overheard me  
tell someone in the car that it's okay  
    to make grave rubbings during a funeral  
to comfort the dead, or if I heckled a  
    medicine woman for expecting the family  
to pay her two ga-zillion rupees  
    for protecting their loved one's passage  
to the spirit world.

Don't these examples of  
    thoughtless expedience sound  
like the same old story?

In the end, the outline of the mountain  
    through the mist shows the way  
songbirds have flown.

4-

*Three monks had no water to drink,*  
they said on Mt. Atonement, TX.

Nor would anyone haul water from the river  
to mop the floors-- not the kitchen tile,  
not the hundred-year-old fir  
in the dining hall, not the heart  
of pine in the monks' cells upstairs,  
because they perceived everything  
as emptiness.

“Working for the common good  
is the great friend and companion  
that will never leave you,”  
said the Mountain,  
but this monastic order practiced  
a cowboy freedom of awareness--  
not exactly what the Buddha taught  
would make human beings great.

When people try to protect themselves  
from samsara, they are probably  
struggling against what will save them.

Their Rinpoche's inexhaustible good

nature spread like a film of oil  
on the Gulf of Good Intentions,  
but those three monks tossed  
a lit match on it.

## Death Meditation

The way death suddenly appears--  
hooded and holding a curved sickle before  
a man whose surprise pins his ears  
back, freezes him in his tracks, stifles a laugh  
in death's enveloping presence-- never fails  
to separate my wheat from my chaff.

What better *memento mori* is there  
to convey impermanence with such terse  
finality? The skull and crossbones pairing,  
the tombstone, a wake of vultures?  
The hourglass, the banshee, the wheel  
of life?-- all conjure death's pall.

But on this summer solstice, I'd like  
to call him the farmer of death, and together  
we'll sit on the porch and talk politely about  
the harvest that will come, no matter what  
the weather, that will fill the buckets,  
the cellars, the allotted barns of eternity.

If only death would sing to me  
after supper, have a little combo or  
a power trio, and he and his band mates

down at the barn would light it up  
on their stratocaster, bass,  
and drum kit late into the night.

If only I could watch him direct,  
by the light of the moon, a great death scene  
that I'm not in, then thankfully genuflect  
in the gravel road, feeling the joy  
of the journey, mindful for a little  
while longer of what life reveals.



## Reincarnation Meditation

I remember living on this mountain  
    many kalpas ago. There's the village,  
a little more sunken in the ground,  
a little more obscured by vines  
    and trees, further collapsed by wind  
and rain, a lot more abandoned  
    and vandalized.

Walking around the ruins,  
trying to remember what this and that  
    used to look like, what took place  
here and there, I poke the dirt  
    with my foot, stir up something  
that may be a clue-- could it be  
    something precious like a bracelet,  
or everyday like a cup, or the bony  
    snout of a long-dead pet?

Inside our farmhouse--  
    four roofless walls really--  
I look up at the full moon,  
hear a nightingale in the woods,  
try to conjure from the shadows  
    the people who lived here

with me, asleep on a hot summer  
night like this, and wonder what  
form chaos took, what we didn't  
see coming-- storm, drought,  
foreclosure, old age--  
what was it that drove us out--  
some crime, pestilence, war,  
entropy, or just bad karma--  
where was I when it happened?  
One of the first to die or living  
in self-exile--I can't recall.

Why can't I unravel this mystery,  
accept it as God's will,  
or at least revise the story  
to redeem the fallen?-- unanswerable  
questions keep me coming back.

No one has ever cleared  
this ground and rebuilt-- maybe  
they were told it was too much  
trouble, there was a curse,  
invaders had plowed salt  
into the fields, poisoned the well,  
a ghost was left to haunt the place--

maybe that's me.

## Wandering Meditation

*When your mind wanders, carefully bring  
it back:*

sage advice for meditators  
everywhere.

I picture a little dog; perhaps  
a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel that  
has squeezed through a gap in a picket  
fence and wandered off down the  
sidewalk,  
its already spacy-nature southbound,  
ramped up with instinct's expectation,

its big brown eyes looping left and  
right, its floppy pink tongue curled and  
performing inhalations and  
exhalations at such a good rate  
that a breath of fire master would  
marvel, its tiny feet rim-shotting  
the sidewalk as they carry the  
sweet little dog off into the wild  
blue yonder.

Or I remember my mind once

belonged to a four-year-old boy,  
lifting his head from the daycare  
blanket on the floor where he's  
resisting a nap with  
his classmates,

recognizing that his keepers  
are in the waiting room, watching  
“The Guiding Light”, and seizing  
the moment, he crawls toward an exit,  
walks unnoticed across the freezing playground,  
expertly scales the chain-link fence,  
walks away down the busy sidewalk  
of a Pittsburgh neighborhood  
without a single backward glance,

thinking about a Hostess Twinkie  
he can get at the corner grocery,  
even though he has no money,  
even though he has no real conception  
of paying since his mother always said,  
“Sonny-boy, here's a sweet treat  
for being a good little buckaroo.”

If my mind wanders the streets during  
meditation practice like that

black and white spaniel,  
or like that four-year-old version of  
myself, I'll just bring it back-- no  
questions asked, but grateful.

## Beach Wind Meditation

Grandmother March blows sand  
spindrifts in silky ribbons across darker,  
heavier sand. Orange and gray shell  
detritus dots the empty strand.

Her gustiness thrusts our hoods  
against our heads as we walk with  
the wind today. Looking like monks  
distracted by so much beauty,

we don't pay attention to magnetic  
fields like loggerhead turtles. We aren't  
good at path integration like  
pelicans, nor can we find our way

home from twenty-thousand body  
lengths like sand fiddlers:  
we've lost our ability to  
navigate the beach of sorrows.

When I have a belly-full of my own  
rough weather, my mind blown apart like  
clouds in a nor'easter, I admire the way  
gulls sit in darkening sea swales.

She gave me such  
a bad case of *logorrhea* that  
the churning tide of words makes  
my weathered head sea-sick.

Then I see the meditation god  
Manjusri coming up the beach,  
riding a blue lion, his sword  
shining in the cold, afternoon sun.



















## Bali Retreat Meditation

And when I heard that they would go  
on a meditation retreat to Bali,  
I admired their spiritual couplehood--  
that man and that woman agreeing to live

in separate suites for weeks, not talking  
to anyone but listening to their own Monkey-  
Mind chatter for the sake of stalking  
what exists in between the feelings

and thoughts, for the sake of waking up  
to the present moment, for the sake of glimpsing  
their own Buddha Nature, and rubbing  
elbows with other seekers, and having up-close

and personal encounters with more evolved  
beings and spiritual gurus who had Tibetan names  
like Kanayo Kangyu and Sakora Chodrun  
instead of Tom and Nancy,

and who sought refuge, and were connected  
to legendary lineages going back many Kulpas,  
and who knew Tibetan mantras, liturgies,  
and prayers by heart, and were now

motivational speakers with websites  
and huge engagement fees, or who played  
the gong, or the harmonium in tight kirtan  
bands named Dharma Gold or Prana

Warriors or Crown of Ecstasy,  
and who got invited to play at exclusive  
retreats, headlined by Tenzin Dass or Shiva  
Rinpoche, for a zero-sum Energy Exchange,

which is as good as money in the spiritual bank--  
unlike the couple I knew who maxed-out  
their Visa and MasterCards for the chance  
to advance their status on the spiritual circuit,

while vacationing in Bali-- and my friends told  
me I was just as guilty of Spiritual Materialism  
for being jealous, and I should offer a blessing  
to dissolve that pernicious klesha.



## No Resting Place Meditation

Reality neither exists

nor doesn't exist; it is neither  
form nor emptiness-- I've heard

it said, but I believe it's more  
like a Bali street bazaar:

a labyrinth of vendor stalls,

alleyways, covered streets,

and underground dead-ends where you

can buy food, clothing, jewelry, art,

trinkets, herbs, native medicine,

straw baskets, carved furniture,

and ten-thousand more things,

spilling into the street, broken up

by heaps of garbage, illustrative

of the paradox of something being

both right and wrong-- and learning

to accept it.

The vendors, mostly women,

will aggressively hawk their wares,

all selling the same stuff, so

competition for the tourist dollar

will be sharp. Right off, a female clerk

will state the price of the item

you have noticed, but hints she might  
do better. If you don't say anything,  
she will ask you to say what  
you will pay rather than let you walk  
away, which you won't be able to do  
the first time you try, and she will  
never stop talking, trying to add items  
to the pile, discounted and bundled,  
she will promise.

Then there's the currency: one U.S.  
dollar for 13,000 Indonesian rupees,  
so just buying a shirt will cost  
78,000 rupees, which sounds like  
a helluva lot until you think about it:  
a quality cotton batik shirt  
for six dollars U.S.

The oddest item for sale  
in the bazaar will be a bottle opener  
with a wooden handle carved into  
the shape of an erect penis,  
often decoratively painted in  
colorful flowers and designs,  
displayed by the dozens on table  
tops in almost every street stall.

How will you be able to  
experience the wide-open mind  
of prajnaparamita in such  
a place-- the mind that is satisfied  
with no resting place at all?

*Om gate gate paragate  
panasamgate bodhi  
suaha-- 3X.*

## Bali Fishing Meditation

Moon-glade fading, an hour's sail  
    behind us, we had enough light then  
to see an island veiled from  
    our shore, the towering  
purple-blue clouds on the horizon  
    a mythical forest, and over our left  
shoulders, Mt. Agung, an active volcano  
    with a decades-old burn  
track all the way to the sea.

Ahead of our jukung outrigger,  
dolphins surfaced, giving Guday  
    his first sign a big school of mackerel  
was close enough to dole out his  
    many-hooked, unbaited trolling line  
from the simple wooden reel he held  
    in his hand, then wind it around  
the big toe and heel of his right foot.  
When he felt sufficient drag, he stood and  
    pulled in the line, surprisingly covered  
with small, shiny, wriggling mackerel.

I studied the Balinese fisherman's  
    natural instinct for finding and catching

fish-- why didn't I feel a calling for catching  
something in my life? For what  
should I be fishing? Or was I  
just another bony, bloodsport  
fish myself, hooked and overplayed  
on some fisherman's line?  
Since the next day was Ogoh-Ogoh  
Day, would revenants  
cause suspense on the waters?

He deftly stripped the fish off  
the hooks and tossed them into  
the bottom of the canoe.  
The small Pacific jack mackerel  
had two back stripes and  
a deeply-forked tail, migrated  
in large schools an hour or so  
off the steep Bali coast, and is  
a forage fish for cod, shark,  
dolphin, and sea birds.

God-faced clouds on the horizon  
finally parted, sun-wake danced  
on the lake-like surface of the Bali Sea,  
the day's heat began to build. Dolphins  
swarmed around our canoe, excited

that mackerel spilled near the surface.

In my frisson, thoughts schooled  
together like mackerel, the dolphin  
of dreams broke the glassy pool  
of my true mind. At last, I became just  
another drop of saltwater finding my sea.

## Exorcism Meditation

“Ogoh-ogoh is dead, long live Ogoh-ogoh!”

Her words demonized him: he felt her fangs growing in his mouth, her talons erupting from his fingers, her angry-red breasts hanging down from his chest, engorged and inflamed. Transmuted by her words, he felt himself dying, her words becoming his words: “Ogoh-ogoh is dead, long live Ogoh-ogoh,” he said.

She had worked on him all night, shaping the Ogoh-ogoh around him, and by morning he was complete, the papier-mache demon she had willed into being stood before her, and she was pleased. He could not move, looking down at himself, he was astonished and afraid; he felt he no longer existed, that some witchy spell had robbed him of his soul. Trapped inside a demon for some strange karma, he'd be burned alive at the village crossroads at sunset, purifying the earth for the new year, restoring the cosmic balance.

Then it was almost dark, and the streets  
were jammed with excited Balinese,  
dressed in head scarves and sarongs,  
yelling at the Ogoh-ogoh carried on bamboo  
platforms by men and children, the sekeha-  
tavna clubs of the village, bands played  
booming drums and eerie gamelons,  
as the people jeered at him, and masked  
children set off bamboo hand cannons,  
adding to the chaos.

Wordless, he looked out of the eye holes  
of the Ogoh-ogoh on the dark scene,  
and no longer felt like a ritual  
drama was playing itself out, no mere  
symbolic ceremony. Time seemed to  
stand still for him, a spiritual  
warrior against his will, about to be  
sacrificed to the flames.

Or would he awake on Nyepi Day,  
reflecting in silent gratitude,  
himself again, forgiven and renewed,  
piecing together the nightmare that  
had seemed all too real?



## Hong Kong Meditation

The mind is like the jet stream,  
moving thoughts far north, over the Arctic  
before crossing desolate Siberia,  
Mongolia, and China, descending  
through morning fog, which often hides  
the mountainous island of Hong Kong.

Recently it was discovered the tallest  
building there had destroyed  
the city's feng shui, so adding to the sprawl,  
another was built across the harbor  
in Kowloon to restore harmony  
with nature: relative beauty is  
illusory, but absolute beauty  
is unchanging and potent  
in this fleeting moment.

Would our minds take us on  
such foggy journeys if we  
believed homecomings were forbidden?  
So many Hong Kong skyscrapers  
to go up for the view and a cocktail--  
so many more than anywhere else  
in the world. None with fourth,

fourteenth, or twenty-fourth floors,  
though, because they remind  
the Chinese of Death.

A breeze moves plastic tarps hiding  
repairs to the twenty-seven storey building  
next door. They hang on bamboo scaffolding,  
reaching all the way to the roof  
on one side. On another side, a clothes pin  
is blown off a window clothesline and falls  
twenty-floors to a third-floor terrace,  
startling a woman sweeping leaves.  
There is no beginning, middle, fair or unfair  
ending-- there is only the present moment  
that is its own turning point.

Don't compare the dropped clothes pin  
with some other clothes pin, the bamboo  
scaffolding with bamboo growing in Victoria Park,  
this hidden Hong Kong mountain with one ablaze  
with sunshine. Observe the appearances of  
things, let them develop a sense of spaciousness  
around you, and lead you to recall  
the connectedness of all things.

## Cool-Loneliness Meditation

On what is the present moment,  
meditators and mayflies agree:

the instance when  
    the lotus starts to wilt,  
the gap in the breath  
    after the lungs have filled  
and exhalation begins,

the split-second rush  
    of recognition in the eyes  
of former lovers,  
the imperfectly synchronized  
    movements of a dozen

elderly Asians  
    practicing tai-chi  
in hooded raincoats,  
the sudden sourness of dog  
    pee floating on the public stairs

between Hang Tai Street  
    and Victoria Park,  
the quick thwack of the

Jardine Market butcher's sharp  
cleaver through a joint of beef.

Reality is neither  
form nor emptiness;  
It is cool-loneliness.

## Fishbone Meditation

When you are eating a whole baked fish  
in an eighth-floor Thai restaurant behind  
the Causeway Bay district of downtown  
Hong Kong, you must be very mindful

and in the present moment because  
the number of bones you encounter  
is creepy-- what kind of fish is this?--  
and the flavor of the white meat keeps

your attention focussed and keeps you  
picking it from between the ribs  
and giving a little cheer as your dinner  
date deftly rips away the backbone.

Cooked in ginger, lemon grass, shallots,  
garlic, and butter, the smell and taste threaten  
to transport you from the moment,  
beckon you to recall any fish that tasted

better, until you crack open the head,  
and there sit the eyes like tiny yellow-green  
pearls, causing you to pause, pay homage,  
and honor only this dreamy fish.

As you sip wine, you recall the day  
before in the fishing village of Tai O.  
Did you see any fresh fish? Maybe there  
had been, but most were dried

and piled up in woven baskets, lining  
the narrow streets in tiny, crowded shops,  
one almost identical to the last, or hanging  
hot on strings like clothes drying

in the sun, stinking as only fish can  
until they have completely dried out.  
Old women in the backs of the shops, playing  
Mahjong, shooing you away, and shouting,

“No photo! No photo!” So, you quickly  
focus and snap photos of baskets of  
dried fish, dried sea urchins, dried  
seahorses, dried shrimp, and dream of

eating a delicious baked fish in some  
nice Hong Kong restaurant someday  
while you await the bus back to town.  
Ah, the world is what everyone prays

it will be!























## Attachment Meditation

My mother used to say,  
“Mr. Can’t died in a cornfield,  
Buddy Boy.” I remember this  
    whenever I can’t  
let go of something.

Sometimes I can’t let go of  
    my past, which seems to remind  
me of how I got to be me. Sometimes  
    I can’t let go of personal belongings  
that are worthless, but worth more  
    to me than they have any right to be:  
the oak desk I stripped and refinished  
when I left home and went to college;  
the sailor cookie jar that stood on  
    a high shelf in my grandmother’s kitchen,  
and is now in my last kitchen.  
And sometimes I can’t let go  
    of special teachers whom  
I believed would always be there:  
my grand parents, my parents,  
my brothers, my old friends,  
my wives....



I used to see Mr. Can't, paralyzed  
by self-doubt, curled up in a ball,  
homeless on the red ground, looking  
up at corn stalks and beyond  
to an endless blue sky.

For Mr. Can't, the worst perception is  
forgetting that he is the perceiver.

## Sunflower Meditation

With all the interest  
of a hungry sparrow,  
he found working around  
its edge to be the best way  
to remove the hard, black seeds.

The spiral's golden  
ratio led him to the true  
center of the head.  
Moving his thumb down the row  
was like walking for a moment

along a bright path.  
Soon the husk was a shapely  
cup, beautiful in  
its emptiness, holding only  
a summer of sunsets.

## Pokeberry Meditation

Pilgrim pokeberry grew through  
a rusty crack in a oil drum

the size of a small temple  
and stood there all winter.

No lotus without mud, said the  
bodhisattva, accepting all.

At night its true nature shines,  
and my eye rests upon it for a moment,

even though it has no leaves and  
casts a gaunt, inky, moon shadow.

I smiled when a dirty, white cow  
nosed and broke a berry-filled branch.

Does it lift pieces of itself  
in hopes of becoming suddenly

an adequate perch for a small  
bird to rest and sing?

## Never-Mind Meditation

"Makes no never-mind  
to me,"

said the mockingbird  
when no one answered  
any of his dozen songs,

said the cloud,  
blown apart by the wind  
and divided by mountains,

said the barn  
when its foundation cracked  
after one hundred years,

said the cornstalks  
as the farmer hoed out  
burdock and pigweed,

said the cow  
as she lifted her tail and  
squirted a stream of piss,

said the hay bale,  
smoking at its core and  
ready to burst into flames,

said the black snake,  
flattened by a truck's wheel  
in the country road,

said the old man,  
waiting on the porch  
for his love to round the bend,

"because my happiness is  
not the only happiness."

## Southern Summer Meditation

Whippoorwill practicing the breath of fire at midnight.  
Deer eating newly-planted raspberry canes.  
No expectations, no attachments.

Mountain weather monkey-shines:  
we needed socks yesterday,  
but today enjoy naked yoga.

From the porch, we watch a giant shadow  
cross the field, come up the hill,  
and overtake us. We never see what  
it belongs to.

Everything but dying is entertainment.  
I look so tired, you say, even though there's nothing  
remarkable about imagining one's own death.

You want to spell me awhile,  
but I am searching for things we can't resist,  
ever mindful that our time is slipping away.

Our mantra: what happened was, after all, inevitable;  
what is happening now can't be explained;  
and what will happen next is anyone's guess.

A West Coast guru visiting our sangha said  
that consciousness isn't a syllogism,  
that we should focus on the breath  
as though our lives depended on it.

So we pay for everyone's pain  
with the god's penny of our inhale,  
discover peace aborning with every exhale.

The rasping mantra of the cicadas  
fills the afternoon until we know  
their pure buddha nature.

## Southern Dating Meditation

Romance can make lickspittles of us all.  
His lips form words of honey foggle,  
mouth lapis linguae until he owns them:

*Do you have a bandaid? because I just  
scraped my knees falling for you.  
Or, Did you just sit in a pile of sugar?  
because you sure have a pretty sweet ass.*

She would laugh and say, “Don’t founder  
yourself attempting sweet talk. If you could see  
through my eyes, you would know your secrets  
are unknowable even to you.”

Yes, he is a man walking  
in the golden land of love who must accept  
complete groundlessness.

During her morning meditation, she thought:  
*He is like water in my hands, moving away  
down the mountain while I try to hold him  
close by not holding him.*



*Of course, it's possible that I could break his heart. But then, it's just as likely that he could break his own heart.*

## Southern Valentine Meditation, Unexpurgated

The more evolved the reasons he gave  
for loving her seven chakras to bits,  
the more she thought him brave  
for having no real reason but her tits.

For loving her busty buddha spirit,  
she fed his every human delight,  
taught him to live in the moment, never fear it.  
Sweet, mindful intimacy was their right,

so they praised each other's sexual appetite,  
despite hearing it might lead to *reintarnation*.  
Could their kisses bring love and light  
if they choose tantra rather than ejaculation?

(*Reintarnation*: After death, coming back to life  
as a hillbilly. Urban Dictionary)

## Booty-Call Meditation

When the mind asks for something  
self-destructive, it's not for want  
of loving kindness, but to kill  
the ego that haunts it.

Thus have you heard that pain  
cannot stop pain,  
nor suffering exhaust suffering;  
that anger cannot outrage anger,

nor love deny love;  
and our taste for gain and loss  
is enough to fill  
the eight-bottled Methuselah.

When the booty-call  
of shenpa has you by the balls,  
tantric stillness might not be at all  
what you desire, but it's what

your desire needs. Lust-- out  
of control, forever hungry,  
seductive-- must bow before

the beloved's heart chakra.

Now the clarity of the moment  
might not be what you expected,  
but it's what expected you to wake up,  
To fill your life's loving cup.

## Kundalini Yoga Meditation

Nine o'clock in the morning at the Muddy  
Lotus Yoga Studio on Haw Creek Road--  
Ashtanga-trained Siri Sunshine in her white  
Gautama Pajamas is leading a class of  
Beginners' Kundalini-- I think she's made up  
her mind we're Planet Fitness wash-outs,  
YMCA bankrupts, and 5K Fun-Run ACL-tear  
survivors, and she will show us no mercy.

Her ethereal, Ram-Dass-schooled voice  
is already in its Bali-certified, Second-Level,  
Teaching Professional auto-pilot, a telepathic  
whisper announcing warm-ups: sufi-grinds,  
side bends, neck rolls, shoulder shrugs,  
and spinal flexes in Easy-Pose-- followed by  
pranayama breath work with alternating closed  
nostrils, including lots of Breath of Fire minutes,  
and a Kriya designed to cleanse the liver  
of all that craft beer we drink and the colon  
of all that pit-cooked Southern barbequed pork  
we eat.

Siri Sunshine warns us that this Kriya

will make us shit within two-hours,  
which makes us squirm a little on our Signature  
Yogi Bhajan Yoga Mats, our Crystal Chakra  
Hand-Woven Blankets, and our Trade-Free  
Miracle Mantra Cotton Bolsters, piled up like  
Asian easy-chairs to accommodate every  
bony ass and fat ass on the consecrated,  
cork yoga studio floor this morning.

We're supposed to have our eyes eight-tenths  
closed and focused between our eyebrows,  
looking into our Third Eyes, but I'm watching  
Siri Sunshine, who is a thirty-something  
knock-out yogini, and because her verbal commands  
don't seem humanly possible,  
as she extends our breath suspensions right up  
to the edge of consciousness,  
while d-j-ing kirtan music on her I-Phone  
PA System, so we can stay in the best yoga  
mood to unblock at least Chakras One,  
Two, and Three.

I'm hoping my Kundalini Serpent will  
rise up from its Sacral Triangle Nest and  
begin its ascent up The Silver Cord  
to impress Siri Sunshine and my mat mates,

rather than stir up any residual  
Viagra from last night's Tantric session with  
the lovely Double-D, whom I just met  
through the dating website Tantra for Seniors.

Of course, my Monkey-Mind spins the latter  
scenario so that I imagine ducking into  
Shavasana a bit early, covering up with  
my Crystal Chakra Blanket, and blissing out  
rather than have the whole class witness  
my Awakening from their Standing  
Archer poses.

Perhaps the pretty fifty-something divorcee  
next to me would smile in my direction  
as Siri Sunshine strikes the gong,  
bathing us in a warm infinity pool of sound,  
lining up our wayward chakras for maximum  
Pranic Power, energizing our Cosmic Chi,  
activating our creative Theta Waves  
before the digital singing-bell rings off  
the session, sending us back out into  
the world to spread the light, *Namaste-ing*  
and *Sat-Nam-ing* all our spiritual brothers  
and sisters at the Harris Teeter and  
WalMart on our way to our true homes.

## Gong Bath Meditation

It's shavasana after forty minutes  
or so of kundalini, a kriya  
chosen to benefit your adrenals,  
when the yogi tunes the gong.

The sound swells, speaks, blooms  
for you before it decays to a hum.  
With each fresh attack of the mallet,  
the sound returns or *resounds*,

as Yogi Bhajan confirmed it. "Anahad,  
the sound without limit"  
creates a blitz of overtones  
so complex and nonlinear in

the inner ear that your mind  
cannot keep up.  
Some people, maybe you, then hear  
a complete orchestra of instruments--  
bells, harps, horns, human voices!

The gong, a sonic tool for transforming  
the nervous system, drones,  
shimmers, and resonates



the flow of energy along  
the body's core meridians,  
restoring balance and health.

At first you feel muscle twitches,  
even a slight queasiness as  
blockages dissolve from the pitch.  
Then you delight in seeing colors

behind your closed eyelids,  
feel euphoric and at peace.  
Is it because the gong is tuned to  
136.1 Hertz, yielding same vibration

as Earth's orbit around the sun,  
which happens also to be  
the perfect vibration for *Om*,  
the seed syllable of all creation?

The waves of sound roll over you,  
and you are reminded of the rise and  
fall of an ocean's renewing tide,

imagine being carried farther

and farther out on the healing  
voyage to your true home.

## Bear Meditation

I knew I wanted to get a bodhisattva into the book,  
so I liked that one morning during meditation a man  
in a long, black robe was rummaging through the clutter  
and debris at the kitchen door of my mind.

I liked that he gobbled down my recent divorce,  
chugged my meteoric drive across the United States,  
swallowed whole the expensive reno on the old mountain  
farmhouse I bought sight-unseen. I liked that what  
remained for my book would include only what I needed  
to live the rest of my days in peace and become  
*a dirt road sport.*

I knew the holy man in the book looked a lot  
like a black bear, probably walked down from  
the mountain-top, Dharma's Peak, overturned the  
receptacles of my life's garbage, ate thoughtfully  
of my heart, continued his walking meditation through  
the curtainless verge of the woods, and disappeared  
back into the laurel-hell emptiness,  
like a black bear would.

I didn't worry that a neighbor, still in her bathrobe,  
stepped out on her porch in disbelief. You fool,

she said, If you don't tie down your old stuff in that book, I'll report you to the Department of Wild Life!

It had taken a long time to get the bodhisattva, or bear-- whatever-- into my book, so I said to her, I had a moment of clarity just when I thought my Tukdam (Death Meditation) was beginning, that my journey through the heart of darkness was over, and now my mind has finally surrendered.

My neighbor softened then and said, We might be able to help each other. Come to the neighborhood potluck tonight at the clearing in the woods. Bring a covered dish and tell your tale.

At the clearing in the woods, I said, I will join you for the potluck. I'll read a few stories about bears or bodhisattvas-- whatever-- from my book and bring a covered dish of what's leftover of my heart.

Now I'm glad I got into my book the mandala of the *mind-as-a-bear-following-the-wild-turkey-of-its-thoughts*, expressing Buddhist iconography in Appalachian home-spun idioms my neighbors would appreciate.

Tonight I'll read from my book about how the bear

and I baltered around the moonlit lawn like two drunks,  
filthy from head to paw with the mud of samsara,  
glad to have found one another, swaying to the drum-  
beat of my heart about to burst with shenpa and dukkha,  
his heavy breath so close to my ear, hypnotic and  
seductive, which might have felt crazy dangerous,  
but I had learned from writing my book that mindfulness  
would protect me.

After all, I knew the meaning of the mountain koan  
*Does a bear shit in the woods?*-- Sat Nam.

Photographs by the author-- in order of appearance

North Carolina mountains

Yantra

Orb Weaver

Balinese Masseuse

Great Buddha, Lantau Island, Hong Kong

Monkey Forest, Bali

Quan Yin, Bali

Ogoh-Ogoh Day, Bali

Fish dinner, Hong Kong

Bali fisherman

Water lily, Bali

Barn, North Carolina mountains

Pokeberry, North Carolina mountains

Sunflower, North Carolina mountains

Gong, North Carolina yoga studio

The author, photographed by Jeff Blackard



John lives in Asheville, NC. For more information about his creative projects, go to [www.johnablackard.com](http://www.johnablackard.com).